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ABSTRACT

A project is described in which slow learning high school students in British Columbia investigated community housing problems. The objective of the project was to show how investigation of contemporary community problems can help slow learning students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes conducive to responsible citizenship. Methodology involved assessing how a study of community housing problems influenced 225 slow learning students' interest in contemporary problems, attitudes toward fundamental freedoms, open-mindedness, critical thinking skills, self-esteem, and reading comprehension. Students participating in the experiment were involved in reading assignments, field studies, interviews with community resource people, and surveying housing needs and costs. Statistical analysis of pre- and posttest differences between students in experimental groups and in control groups using more traditional curricula indicated that the community investigation project was well received by students and that participation in the project encouraged students to read and understand newspaper headlines, be less dogmatic, think more critically, and improve their self-esteem. On the basis of this project, it was concluded that slow learners can conduct, enjoy, and benefit from studies into problems of the local community and that community problems can provide a suitable pedagogical environment for developing citizen-related competencies. (DB)

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INVESTIGATING COMMUNITY PROBLEMS WITH CLASSES OF SLOW-LEARNING AND NON-ACADEMIC STUDENTS

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INVESTIGATING COMMUNITY PROBLEMS WITH CLASSES OF SLOW-LEARNING AND NON-ACADEMIC STUDENTS

There is a concensus of opinion among social studies educators that a primary responsibility of public education in a democratic society is the preparation of students for responsible, involved citizenship. Consequently, educators must address themselves to the problems of identifying ways to encourage the development in students of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective participation. The purpose of this paper is to propose contemporary community problems as one approach that might be used to this end, and to report an investigation of a community problem conducted by slow-learner and non-academic secondary students in several schools in British Columbia, Canada.[1]

RATIONALE

The qualities of the model citizen have been described in the literature frequently (e.g., Crary, 1951, p. 155; Roselle, 1966). Most often, the citizen our society professes to prize has been characterized as being aware of his community's economic, social, and cultural problems and in addition, as being committed to their resolution (Curtis, 1977). Furthermore, this person has usually been described as possessing decision-making skills, manifesting a concern for the rights of all citizens, and being open-minded to the opinions of others (Curtis, 1978, pp. 21-23).

A number of educators concerned with the development of these attributes have recommended including investigations of contemporary community problems in the social studies program. Contemporary problems,

they have argued, provide appropriate content both for interesting students in the affairs of their communities and for motivating students to act on social problems (Massialas, Sprague, & Hurst, 1975, p. 15). Educators have suggested also that contemporary problems provide a pedagogical milieu suitable for nourishing the growth of such personality traits as open-mindedness, responsibility, self-direction, and cooperativeness (Molinaro, 1952; Eichert, 1959). And the opinion has been expressed that a number of skills necessary for understanding issues and for dealing with community problems may best be taught within the context of community problems. Among the more commonly mentioned are problem-solving and critical thinking skills, communicative and argumentative skills, group process skills, and skill in dealing with the values related to public issues (Ballinger, 1963; Cleary, 1965; Lagana, 1972; Metcalf, 1963; Ochoa & Manson, 1972).

Research findings have provided some support for these opinions. A review of the literature revealed that the contemporary problems approach seems to be more effective than traditional content for developing critical thinking skills, research skills, and work habits, and for involving students in community affairs (Curtis, 1978, pp. 50-76).

Community Problems in Social Studies Programs for Slow-Learners and Non-Academic Students

A few special educators have advocated the inclusion of contemporary community problems in social studies curricula for slow-learners. In addition to the preceding arguments, these eductors have suggested that contemporary problems satisfy several criteria recommended for selecting social studies content for slow-learner and non-academic programs. That is, investigations of contemporary community problems allow the teacher to select content that is topical, related to the students' present experiences

and, in particular, to their daily lives, is concerned with the "here and now", and is "people-centered" (Cuban, 1970; Dimitroff, 1965, p. 192; Webster, 1966, p. 591). Moreover, this content can be presented with concrete, first-hand experiences in a learning environment that permits active student involvement in the problem (Chernow & Chernow, 1973, p. 127; Tate, 1971, p. 35). Furnishing students with opportunities to interact with community resource persons may have a positive effect on student-self-esteem (Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner, 1967; Curtis, 1972). Besides being a legitimate objective for all school programs, increasing self-concept is a particularly important objective for social studies instruction. Rosenberg's study (1962) indicated that persons with low self-concepts are reluctant both to discuss or become involved in public affairs.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was designed to address the question, What effects, if any, would the investigation of a contemporary problem by slow-learning and non-academic high school students have upon the following: their interest in contemporary problems, their attitude toward fundamental freedoms, their closed-mindedness, their critical thinking skills, their self-esteem, and their reading comprehension? Additional questions concerning the attitudes of students and parents toward including community problems in the social studies program were also considered.

METHOD

The Subjects

The students (N=225) were enrolled in special classes for slow-learners and non-achievers, and in non-academic vocationally-oriented programs in eight secondary schools located in six school districts outside

Vancouver. The random selection of individual students for the experimental and control groups could not be accomplished as a feature of the research design. Because of the small number of students enrolled in special classes, in only four of the project schools were two classes available for the study. In these schools, class assignment to experimental and control groups was determined by the toss of a coin. The ages of the students ranged from 15 to 21 years. Mean ages for the classes ranged from 15.5 to 18.3 years. A comparison of these mean ages with mean ages for comparable grades in the academic program disclosed that these students tended to be at least two years older than their peers in academic classes. The percentage of boys (47.1%) was not significantly different from the percentage of girls (52.9%). The communities in which the project schools were situated varied in size and degree of urbanity, from the Greater Vancouver region to small rural communities in the interior of the province.

The Program

The problem. During the four month period of the study, students employed an inquiry approach to investigate housing conditions in their communities. Housing satisfied several criteria (e.g., Quillen & Hanna, 1948, p. 130; Gross, 1956; Otto, 1956, p. 165) suggested for selecting contemporary problems for classroom examination: Insufficient housing was a problem common to most communities throughout the province; it could be investigated with data collected by the students in their own communities; it was appropriate to the maturity and experiential levels of the students; it lent itself to the use of field studies and resource persons; and, it was a problem that the students, upon leaving school, would encounter.

The inquiry model. The decision to use inquiry as the primary teaching mode for the investigations resulted from suggestions in the literature (e.g. Keller, 1972, pp. 144-145; Shive, 1973, pp. 25-30) that an inquiry problem-solving model was most appropriate for investigating contemporary problems in the classroom. This model consisted of the following steps:

(1) The identification and selection of a particular problem to be studied;

(2) The formulation of appropriate hypotheses that suggest reasons for the existence of the problem and/or serve as guidelines for the inquiry;

(3) The collection of relevant data;

(4) The analysis of the data by evaluating the reliability of the sources, distinguishing between fact and fiction, distinguishing among statements of facts, opinions, and values, and drawing inferences from facts;

(5) The acceptance, rejection, or modification of the hypotheses.

The model was extended to include social action by selecting steps from the inquiry post-inquiry model described by Simon (1970). These were as follows:

(6) Discussion concerning the need to take action on the problem;

(7) The identification of legitimate courses of action for protesting the existence of the problem or for suggesting possible programs for the remediation of the problem;

(8) The identification of the possible consequences of each course of action;

(9) The taking of whatever action is considered by the students to be necessary and appropriate;

(10) The evaluation of the action.

In addition to providing the students with a logical sequence of clearly defined stages or steps for investigating housing in their communities, inquiry presented an appropriate setting for teaching and practicing critical thinking skills (Hunkins & Shapiro, 1967; Miklos & Miklos, 1971). Further, during the collection of the data opportunities were provided for group and committee work, and during the discussion and evaluation of the data opportunities were provided for argument and debate.

Including social action in the steps of the inquiry model reflected current social studies philosophy (e.g., *Citizenship Objectives for the 1974-75 Assessment*, 1972, pp. 24-29; Newman, 1975; Newman, Bertocci, & Landsness, 1977; NCSS Ad Hoc Committee on Social Studies Guidelines, 1979). Generally, educators advocating social action activities in the social studies program have contended that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for rational, effective participation are best developed through programs that provide students with opportunities to take action on problems--should they decide to do so (Gillespie & Mehlinger, 1972; Ochoa & Manson, 1972).

Student inquiry was designed to address the following questions: Is there a housing problem in your community? What are the factors that affect the cost of housing? What can be done to lower the cost of housing? What can be done to provide adequate rental accommodations? (And, concurrently, What are the rights and responsibilities of renters and owners?), and What are appropriate methods for taking action in a democratic society?

Materials. Field studies and interviews with community resource persons were important sources of information for the investigation. To complement the data collected in the local community, students were presented with a wide variety of readings. These included articles, editorials,

letters to the editor, advertisements, and "Action Line" requests published in the Vancouver *Sun* and the Vancouver *Province*; speeches from *Hansard* (for British Columbia), provincial and municipal government reports, newsletters, and bills; magazines such as *Maclean's, Reader's Digest, Time,* and *Better Homes and Gardens;* and publications from real estate companies, financial institutions, and unions.

Student investigations: Introductory lessons. The purpose of the introductory lessons--which were the same for all classes--was to arouse interest in the problem and to raise questions about the adequacy of housing facilities in the students' communities. During these lessons, students viewed a number of slides of a representative sample of the houses for sale in Vancouver during August, 1974. Data sheets containing newspaper descriptions and listing the monthly mortgage and tax payments for each house were used by the students to estimate the amount of money needed to live in the house, once a down payment of 25% had been made. A table of family incomes was used to determine percentages of Canadian families with incomes adequate to live in the houses. In each class, students expressed surprise at the high costs of the houses and at the small percentage of families with incomes large enough to purchase them; but, they insisted that houses were much less expensive in their communities. The state of the rental market in Vancouver was presented in the same manner. Again, students expressed the opinion that high prices were not typical of their communities.

These opinions provided the motivation for similar surveys of housing by students in the project communities. Lists of houses for sale and for rent were developed from descriptions in local newspapers. Interest amortization tables and municipal property tax records were used to estimate the expenses involved in purchasing individual houses. Levels of income necessary to live in the houses were also estimated.

This general survey of housing was followed by an exercise intended to engage the students in the problem by having them assume the roles of young marrieds seeking housing accommodations. In preparation for this, students completed employment forms on which were listed possible jobs they might have several years after leaving school. Salaries and wage rates for each job were located in tables furnished by Statistics Canada. Using lists--developed from local newspapers or solicited from real estate offices--of houses, condominiums, and apartments for sale or for rent, students left their classrooms and attempted to locate accomodations suitable for young families living on incomes similar to those they might expect to have after having worked for several years. Criteria suggested in several real estate brochures were applied to evaluate the quality of the housing. In only one community were some students able to find housing (in this instance, rental apartments) that they believed would be satisfactory.

Upon their return to the classroom, students were presented with copies of letters to the editor, newspaper and magazine articles, and selections from Royal Commission Reports and government briefs describing people who were, or had been at one time, experiencing difficulties finding adequate housing. Working in small groups, students identified the types of people involved and the reasons for their problems. Studies were conducted to ascertain whether similar problems existed in the project communities. During this part of the study, students investigated the hypothesis, There is a housing problem in our community. The collection of materials relating to this hypothesis necessitated visits to the municipal hall, welfare agencies, apartment managers, and local citizen groups. In each class, students concluded that a lack of suitable housing for many people was a major problem in their community.

Expanding the investigations. Following the acceptance of the initial hypothesis, articles, brochures from private interest groups, and selections from B.C. *Hansard* identifying factors alleged to affect the cost of housing were given to the students. These were followed by additional readings describing ways to reduce the costs of housing (e.g., using materials such as cement and steel) and suggesting alternatives to traditional housing (e.g., mobile homes and condominiums). Hypotheses developed and investigated during this part of the study described ways to make more and cheaper housing available in the project communities. These hypotheses formed the basis for additional community research involving interviews with local politicians, developers, managers of mortgage departments of banks, trust, and finance companies, representatives of trade unions, real estate dealers, and operators of mobile home parks.

Two sets of critical thinking lessons were incorporated into the study as the students examined the preceding hypotheses. The first set was developed around the analysis of a tape of a "hot-line" broadcast pertaining to housing in the Vancouver area. A work sheet required students to identify, weigh, and evaluate the arguments of both the interviewer and interviewee, to search out words and phrases that were emotionally based, to define terms in arguments, to locate irrelevant questions and comments, and to evaluate analogies. The second set consisted of the examination of a comic book about housing. The assignment included questions that had the students locate evidence of the cartoonist's bias, to identify his point of view, to evaluate his arguments, and to locate relevant data from the class materials to test his arguments. Thereafter, when presented with data, students were encouraged to note the source of the information and suggest the person's or group's frame of reference, and to search the material for evidence of bias, ambiguity,

and contradiction. Additionally, they were to judge the authoritativeness of the data and the validity of the arguments presented.

Renting would probably be the concern of most students on leaving school. Therefore, several materials relating to renting were given to students to familiarize them with recent rental legislation and to encourage an in-depth study of the rental market in each community. These materials included copies of the Department of Housing Act (November 7, 1973) and the Landlord and Tenant Act (June 20, 1974), selections from *Hansard*, and newspaper and magazine articles. Interviews with renters, apartment owners and managers were conducted as additional sources of information. The primary question investigated during this phase of the study was concerned with ways of providing more rentals. Secondary questions dealt with rent controls and the rights and responsibilities of renters and owners.

What should be done? When the investigations were completed, students were asked to describe their opinions of the housing problem. This required that they address themselves to questions relating to the provision of adequate housing and to the degree that they believed adequate housing is a basic right of all Canadians. This exercise was followed by a slide-tape presentation describing several families who were experiencing a housing problem. The case studies were developed from situations either described in articles and letters published in Vancouver newspapers or personally known to the author. Using the values analysis strategy suggested by Metcalf (1971), teachers assisted students to identify the value principles implied within their statements of what should be done. Students tested their acceptance of the principles by applying them to new cases. Briefly, the vignettes (on tape) accompanying the pictures consisted of the following problems:

(1) Young, working couple living in substandard housing accommodation. Husband's criminal record and inadequate education inhibit the probability of their increasing their standard of living.

(2) Nineteen year old, unmarried woman, the mother of a young pre-school child. On welfare and forced to live in a small, second-floor apartment in a squalid section of the city.

(3) Young, pregnant widow with three pre-school children who, following the accidental death of her husband, is considering the sale of her attractive suburban home.

(4) Large family of middle-aged taxi driver is forced to vacate rented house upon expiration of lease.

(5) Middle-aged couple unable to maintain the mortgage payments on their modest suburban home when husband is forced to retire following a heart attack.

(6) Elderly couple in early 70's. Husband has no pension and continues to work years after regular retirement age for below average wage in the garment industry. Property taxes and repairs threaten loss of house.

(7) Swamper-driver refuses to work and insists on change of job following back injury alleged to have occurred while unloading truck. The family's financial resources are exhausted and mortgage payments are in arrears.

In small groups, students selected two or three cases and attempted to determine what would happen to the people in the vignettes if they lived in the students' communities. This exercise required students to contact welfare agencies, mortgage officers, municipal clerks in the tax department, and counselors at the Workmen's Compensation Board. When this information was determined, students' opinions about what should happen to the people were solicited. This resulted in some students modifying their earlier opinions about housing.

Social action. At the time that the housing investigations were concluding, a group of AIM supported Indians established an armed blockade

on an interior B.C. highway to protest what they insisted were deplorable housing conditions on their reservations. This event furnished the basis of a series of lessons on social action. Discussion centered on whether this action should have been taken, its legality, its violation of the rights of others, and its possible consequences. Additional materials consisted of articles selected from recent issues of local newspapers that described protests by a variety of individuals and groups. These protests included such forms as writing letters to the editors of newspapers, submitting complaints to action-lines, picketing, refusing to move when lease was terminated without proper cause, holding protest meetings, and marching on city hall. Telephoning radio hot-line moderators and writing to members of the provincial Legislative Assembly and the federal Parliament were also discussed. Social action by project students was noted in one class when, following an examination of their community's facilities for elderly persons, a letter was written to the Minister of Human Resources urging the construction of additional nursing homes. In several other classes, students presented the data they had collected and argued the need for adequate housing during interviews with municipal officials and their local M.L.A.

Program summary. Table 1 contains a summary of the treatment program. Although the sequence of activities was the same for all experimental classes, the number of periods required for some activities varied.

TABLE 1: Suggested Period Organization and Sequence of Activities

PART	PERIOD(S)	CONTENT
I		*Does a housing problem exist in students' community?*
	1	Introduction, pictures of houses for sale in Vancouver.
	2	Who can afford to buy the houses?

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

PART	PERIOD(S)	CONTENT
	3	Pictures of houses for rent in Vancouver.
	4	Who can afford to rent the houses?
	5-6	Develop hypothesis. Discuss: (a) When does the existence of certain conditions become a problem? (b) What criteria will be used to judge "adequate" housing?
	7	Introduction to "Classified Section" of local newspaper. Locate addresses of (a) houses and condominiums for sale, (b) houses and apartments for rent.
	8	Employment information sheet.
	9	Preparation for community research.
	10-13	Students locate and photograph appropriate selection from 7a and 7b.
	14-16	Prepare data sheets on above, include taxes on houses for sale (visit/telephone city hall).
	17	Mount pictures and discuss.
	18	Introduction to various kinds of data: (a) newspapers, (b) magazines, (c) B.C. *Hansard*, (d) government reports.
	19-20	Groups summarize content of several materials e.g., identify the person or group having problem, determine reason or reasons why they are encountering difficulty finding suitable housing.
	21	Discuss methods of ascertaining whether similar persons or groups are experiencing difficulty in students' community.
	22-23	Students attempt to answer questions posed in 21.
	24	Report findings to class.
	25	Conclusion: accept, reject, or modify the hypothesis.
	26	Preliminary discussion of housing "needs"/ "rights".
II		*What afffects the cost of housing?*
	27-28	Critical thinking lesson: analysis of tape of "hot-line" radio broadcast.
	29	Establish criteria to be used for critical analysis of data.
	30-32	Costs involved in the construction of houses, factors that affect selling price.
	33	Analysis of reading materials, discussion of such factos as wages to tradesmen, costs of materials, taxes on materials, price of land, cost of money.

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

PART	PERIOD(S)	CONTENT
	33-35	Critical thinking lesson: analysis of comic book *They Build Houses, Don't They?*
III		*What can be done to lower the cost of housing?*
	36-38	Analysis of reading materials.
	39	Group discussion of suggestions contained within readings.
	40	Preparation of questions to be asked of community resource people.
	41	Development of hypothesis to guide investigation.
	42-43	Planning for community research: trips, interviews.
	44-50	Community research.
	44-52	Discussion and summarization of research.
	53	Discussion of hypothesis.
IV		*What can be done to provide more rentals? What are the rights and responsibilities of renters and owners?*
	54-56	"Landlord and Tenant Act".
	57	Rights and responsibilities of renters and owners.
	58-60	Ways of providing adequate rental accommodations; selections from B.C. *Hansard*, newspapers, magazines.
	61	Community research: interviews with apartment dwellers and managers.
	62	Conclusions, discussion.
V		*Is adequate housing a right for all Canadians?*
	63	Students prepare statement describing housing needs and rights.
	64	Slide/tape presentation of persons having housing problems.
	65	Groups select several cases for examination.
	66-67	Students prepare answers to the following questions: What is available for each family in students' community? What would happen if family lived in students' community?
	68-69	Students "test" values statement (63) by discussing how the housing needs of the families described in the slide/tape presentation should be met.
	70	Students rewrite their statement of their position on housing if considered necessary.

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

PART	PERIOD(S)	CONTENT
VI		*What can a citizen do? (Social Action)*
	71	Discussion of the need for citizen involvement in a democratic society.
	72-73	Ways in which people have recently protested the housing problem in British Columbia; newspaper and magazine articles.
	74	Discussion of each of the above (72-73); Was the method for protesting legal or illegal? What were the consequences on the people taking part? What effect did their action have upon the problem?
	75-76	Students discuss actions they might take (on the housing problem in their community) and the possible consequences of each.
VII		*What is housing like in other countries?* (Made available to students who completed assignments ahead of classmates.)
	Various periods throughout study	Development of hypothesis to guide investigation (e.g., Canada is not alone in having a housing problem. The housing problem in Canada is not as severe as elsewhere.); articles (particularly from magazines) describing conditions in other countries; worksheet--comparison of housing in other countries with that in Canada.

THE HYPOTHESIS

Research hypothesis based on teaching strategies (developed from research reports and other writings) included in the treatment program predicted significant increases for the experimental students in the following: interest in the problem studied, critical thinking, self-esteem, and reading comprehension. A significant decrease in closed-mindedness was hypothesized. The instrument used to assess attitude toward fundamental freedoms was administered as a posttest only and, therefore, the hypothesis predicted only significantly greater scores for the experimental group. Brief descriptions of the teaching strategies are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Strategies Employed in the Study

	STRATEGY	PREDICTED EFFECT
1.	The study of a comtemporary community problem.	Increased interest in and knowledge of community problems (Cruickshank & Johnson, 1967, pp. 220-221; Shelton, 1971, p. 197).
2.	The teaching of specific critical thinking skills; the use of controversial materials; the encouragement of diverse points of view; the free discussion of ideas; the use of the inquiry mode.	Increased critical thinking skills (Henderson, 1950; Kemp, 1963; Starr, 1963, pp. 43-44).
3.	The provision of studies designed to challenge academic abilities, the achievement of successful academic experiences; contacts with community resource persons through a wide variety of field trips.	Increased self-esteem (Coopersmith & Silverman, 1969; Williams & Cole, 1968; Maehr, Mensing, & Nafzger, 1962; Vaughan, 1964).
4.	The provision of numerous readings; the development of a significant reason for reading; the use of relevant reading materials that contain high interest content and are concisely written.	Increased reading comprehension skills (Johnson, 1963, p. 209; Tansley & Gulliford, 1965, pp. 140-141; Weber, 1974, pp. 80-81).
5.	The examination of a significant social issue; the discussion of civil rights as related to aspects of housing.	Increased awareness and acceptance of fundamental freedoms (Douglas, 1966; Jackson, 1968).
6.	The free exchange of ideas; the objective evaluation of data; the use of materials reflecting conflicting points of view; the encouragement of a variety of opinions; the discouragement of premature closure on social problems.	Decrease in closed-mindedness (Kemp, 1963; Weir, 1963).

The Control Classes

During the period of the housing study, students in the four control classes were taught the regular studies courses from the provincial curriculum

guide. In classes 1 and 2, instruction consisted of a chapter by chapter study of a textbook on urbanization in Canada. In both control classes, questions that required students to locate facts, identify main ideas, and reach conclusions were assigned for each chapter. Additionally, students in these classes completed a major project--in most cases, a model or a diagram illustrating some aspect of urbanization. In class 3, social studies instruction centered on a chronological study of Canadian history. During the several months required by the experimental students for the housing project, the control students progressed in their study from New France, through the British Conquest and the establishment of Upper and Lower Canada, to the British North America Act of 1867. In addition to class discussions, learning experiences included answering questions (similar to those mentioned above) for each chapter of the textbook. This approach was used also in class 4. The students in this class studied industrialization in the Soviet Union and the European Common Market.

Design and Instrumentation

Two research designs were utilized. In school districts where comparable classes of students were available for the study, the nonequivalent control group design was employed; in districts where single classes only existed, the one-group pretest-posttest design was used. The data collected using the latter design were considered as replication research to substantiate findings from the nonequivalent control group design.

The formal assignment program consisted of the pretest and posttest administrations of the Newspaper Headlines Test[2] (as a measure of interest in social issues), the Dogmatism Scale (Rokeach, 1960), the Cornell Critical Thinking Test[3], the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1976), and the Reading Comprehension Subtests of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests[4]. The

The Assessment also included the posttest administration of the Freedoms Scale[5], as a measure of attitude toward fundamental rights.

ANALYSIS

Two-way classification analysis of covariance with the data arranged according to treatment and geographic location, and with IQ and pretest scores as covariates, was the basic analysis used for the data from the nonequivalent control group design. The general least squares solution for unequal-sized groups was used, as recommended by Winer (1971, p. 498). The t test for correlated data was used to test pretest-posttest differences for the data collected from the one-group pretest-posttest design.

RESULTS

The findings of the study (which were consistent for males and females and for students from different school districts) were:

1. Significant F-ratios, in favor of the experimental students, were found for the differences between the adjusted mean posttest scores on the experimental and control groups in the nonequivalent control group design on the Newspaper Headlines Test ($p < .01$), the Dogmatism Scale ($p < .01$), the Cornell Critical Thinking Test ($p < .01$), and the Self-Esteem Inventory ($p < .05$).

2. Significant t values were determined for the differences between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the students in the one-group pretest-posttest design on the Newspaper Headlines Test ($p < .01$), the Dogmatism Scale ($p < .01$), the Cornell Critical Thinking Test ($p < .01$), and the Self-Esteem Inventory ($p < .01$).

3. In two of the four schools included in the nonequivalent control group design, the adjusted mean posttest scores of the experimental classes

on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test were significantly greater ($p < .05$) than the scores for their respective control groups. The posttest mean scores on this instrument for three of the four classes included in the one-group pretest-posttest design were significantly greater ($p < .05$) than their pretest mean scores.

4. There was no significant difference between the adjusted mean posttest scores of the experimental and control groups in the nonequivalent control group design on the Freedoms Scale.

Other Data

Interviews were conducted with students and questionnaires were distributed to students and parents following the completion of the housing study. The collection of these data was designed to assess students' and parents' attitudes toward including community problems in the social studies program. Furthermore, answers were sought to questions pertaining to the selection of problems for investigation, classroom organization during investigations, appropriate resource materials, and suitable lengths of time for examining problems.

The following statements summarize students' replies to the items of the questionnaire and students' responses to questions during the interviews.

1. All students agreed that community problems should be included in the social studies program. The most frequently mentioned reason for this opinion was centered on the argument that schools are responsible for preparing students to deal with the kinds of problems they would encounter on leaving school.

2. Students indicated that their interest in and awareness of contemporary community problems increased greatly during the period of the housing study.
3. Most students stated that they preferred to work in small groups on problems they identified, rather than as a class on problems selected by the teacher.
4. Newspapers, pamphlets, and magazines were considered to be the most useful reading materials for investigating a contemporary problem.
5. Seventy-five per cent of the students suggested that periods lasting from two months or more should be devoted to the investigation of single problems.

The items on the parents' questionnaires asked them to state whether their son or daughter had discussed the housing study at home, and, additionally, to indicate their agreement or disagreement with including contemporary problems in the social studies curricula. Of the 49 parents[6] who responded, 90% (N = 44) stated that the housing study had been discussed at home. Moreover, 94% (N = 46) signified support for including contemporary problems in the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

An important conclusion resulting from this study is that students in slow-learner and non-academic secondary programs can conduct rather sophisticated studies into the problems of the local community. Additionally, field studies and interviews with community resource persons are appropriate sources of data for such studies. Other sources of data are reading materials not customarily used in non-academic social studies programs.

A second conclusion resulting from the findings of the study is that the investigation of a contemporary community problem provides a suitable pedagogical environment in non-academic secondary classes for developing certain citizenship-related variables such as knowledge of and interest in contemporary community problems, critical thinking skills, reading comprehension, open-mindedness, and self-concept.

A third conclusion pertains to students' and parents' attitudes toward including investigations of community problems in social studies programs. It is probable that students will manifest a favorable attitude toward such investigations, and they are likely to discuss the problem being examined with their parents at home. Furthermore, parental support for studies of contemporary community problems can be anticipated.

These conclusions have several implications for the development of social studies curricula for non-academic programs. A major implication resulting from the conclusion that slow-learning and non-academic secondary students can engage in more sophisticated studies than those commonly described in many social studies curriculum guides is that social studies courses for these students should not be limited to simplified content selected from academic programs. A viable alternative to these modified courses may be found in investigations of contraversial community problems.

A second implication relating to curriculum is closely associated with the foregoing, and is concerned both with the present emphasis on vocational preparation as a predominent objective of non-academic social studies programs and with the current trend toward reducing the amount of "academic" content in special education programs by including extensive periods of work experience. Implicit within these conditions seems to be the opinion of some special educators that only limited goals for social studies instruction are attainable by non-academic students and that to provide instruction beyond a certain level and at the expense of the "practical" aspects of the special education program is not good pedagogy. The present study, however, has shown that a social studies program featuring the investigation of a community problem is appropriate for affecting the development of particular citizenship characteristics. An important implication is, therefore, that a carefully planned social studies program that encourages the investigation of current community problems is a justifiable enterprise with students in special classes and deserves the consideration of curriculum developers writing programs for these students.

Another implication is concerned with materials available for use in non-academic social studies classes. Modified textbooks and simplified weekly tabloids are presently the usual fare in many secondary programs. The present study strongly suggests that when adequately motivated, slow-learners and non-academic students can respond to a variety of rather sophisticated source materials. Therefore, materials which for the most part have been considered inappropriate might, if judiciously selected and presented, supplement or supplant the standard materials in non-academic social studies programs.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Funding for the project was provided by the Educational Research Institute of British Columbia (ERIBC Grant No. 74).

[2]The format for this test was provided by Oliver and Shaver (1966, pp. 282-284).

[3]R.H. Ennis and J. Millman, The Critical Thinking Project, University of Illinois, Urbana.

[4]Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

[5]Developed by the author for the study.

[6]Addresses were not available for some students, particularly those students living in group or foster homes. Six letters were returned marked "no such address." It is probable that no more than 115 parents would have received the questionnaires.

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